# Chapter 19

# The "Digitalisation" of Youth:
## How Do They Manage and Integrate Digital Technologies?

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## ABSTRACT

*The digitalization of youth signifies their complete immersion, active participation and involvement in the production, consumption and sharing of digital content using various interconnected/interfaced digital devices in their social network interactions. A prerequisite to successful commercial communication with young people is having a good understanding of new media, along with their social and psychological framework. The behaviour, motivation and emotions of youth in general and in relation to digital technologies, especially the meaning attached to mobile phones, the Internet (mainly social network sites) and games (computer-based and portable) should also be addressed if advertisers aim to reach this target group.*

## WHY FOCUS ON YOUTH?

Babies, children, adolescents and young adults are all relatively dependent on their parents. Nevertheless, they are consumers and potential or active consumers. There is consensus recognising children's influence on family decision-making. This influence varies according to the mother's attitudinal dimensions (Roberts, Wortzel, & Berkeley, 1981) and the children's influence on family purchases. Moreover, the likelihood of any given purchase being achieved depends on the collaborative interaction between parent and child (Darian, 1998). The relative influence of each family member varies by product, by stage of the decision-making process, and by various judgment criteria, such as point-of-purchase decisions, the brand, or style in durable goods (Belch, Ceresino, & Belch, 1985). More recently, the increasing expertise of youth with computing and digital media-related tasks turns many parents into becoming learners from their own children (Ekström, 2007). However, such a "new media-savvy" profile expresses a construction of

competence to counteract the discourse made by adults under which kids are permanently exposed to the risk of digital media (MacKeogh, 2001). Compared with previous generations the consumer status of today's youth occurs at an early age. The statement, "kids grow older younger" sums up that process of becoming the decider and consumer quicker and sooner (Mitchell & Reid-Wash, 2005; Siegel, Coffey, & Livingstone, 2001).

Moreover, the youth represent an interesting research area because:

- they are a "market"–relevant by its size (over 200 million citizens are under 16 years-old in the EU and North America) and economic power;
- they can provide indications of trends of how digital technologies may be exploited in the future (e.g.: Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007);
- they are generally (and traditionally) considered a difficult target to access and communicate with (e.g.: Oates & Gunter, 2002; Mangleburg & Bristol, 1998);
- they are a truly global segment since they share similar tastes and preferences in terms of brands, sites and gizmos worldwide (eg.: Larson & Wilson, 2004; Lindstr∅m & Seybold, 2004; Tsai, 2006);
- they are used to getting what they want– in this materialistic world their wishes become mandatory (Bee-Gates, 2006; Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003);
- they are challengers and pioneers, early adopters of technology and eager to change/re-invent the rules (e.g.: Drotner, 2005; Kim, 2008; Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005);
- the current Net-generations will be the future leaders/deciders/buyers–e.g. the young Japanese adults who grew up in the digital era maintain their digital technological habits and use patterns (Miyata, Boase, & Wellman, 2008);

- although evocative the term net generation or digital natives is too simplistic to describe youth - it is more realistic to consider many minorities with distinct and specific relation with new technologies rather than an homogeneous group (Jones, Ramanau, Cross & Healing, 2010).

## NATURE OF DIGITAL MEDIA

The attraction for digital media among young people derives from intrinsic characteristics of digital technology. Before looking at the "digital" aspect, the ideological debate concerning the dialectic nature of media should be considered. The "new" media can be understood by contrasting it with the former format and then exploring the specifics of new media technology.

### Ideological Debate

Although the growing influence of the Internet became particularly evident during the nineties, the ideological roots of the new media lay in the debate between two media theorists during the sixties. Williams (1961, 1976) stressed the complex role of social, cultural and economic dimensions in shaping technologies. Here, human affairs ascertain the pace and scale of how a specific technology is mobilized. Depending on the social use of technology it may be converted into a medium (of communication). To reach this status, it may provide information, express an idea or represent some content or form of the world. Far from considering the development of the media as a human agency, McLuhan (1964, 1969) held that technology is an extension of human capacity. In his conception, (media) technology structures peoples' lives in the manner they pursue their activities, and in particular it affects and changes social arrangements and relationships. The (new) media technology (electronic broadcasting) aesthetically mediates our relation-

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